Pre-Professional Health Careers

- Physician
- Optometrist
- Physical therapist
- Podiatrist
- Dentist
- Veterinarian
- Physician assistant

STUDENT HANDBOOK

CERRITOS COLLEGE
Division of Science, Engineering, and Math
Welcome to Cerritos College and congratulations on your decision to become a health professional! We in the Division of Science, Engineering, and Math provide the basic science classes you will need to prepare yourself for a health profession, but, along with counselors and other college staff, we are also dedicated to your success in every aspect: academic excellence, referral to student support services, encouragement to engage in community service and work in a healthcare setting, networking with peers and professionals, and help maneuvering through the educational system. Your success, though, will be primarily due to your ability to be well informed, follow your educational plan, and be professionally prepared. This handbook is an important tool that will assist you in attaining your goal.

There are many health careers, and an important question that you should be thinking about for a long time is “Which career is the one for you?” Different health careers require different levels of responsibility, knowledge (especially of science), technical skill, interpersonal skills, and empathy. You should constantly be learning more about different careers, to make sure you have made the best decision for you. Volunteering in a healthcare setting is the best way to learn if a profession is one you would like. Health careers also vary widely in the type of education that is required – from certificates that show you have completed the courses needed to be, for instance, a pharmacy clerk or a speech pathology aide, to an associate degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s or doctorate degree. If you are interested in a certificate or associate degree, we encourage you to speak often with a counselor to make sure you are headed in the right direction.

This handbook, however, is intended to help students who are interested in transferring to complete a bachelor’s degree and continue in a graduate-level health profession (physician, veterinarian, optometrist, dentist, pharmacist, podiatrist, physical therapist, physician assistant, public health educator, to name just a few).

Health professions like those above require a solid background in science and math, and sometimes students think that grades are the only important thing they should worry about. But, health professional schools also want to know that you have the personal attributes that will make you an excellent healthcare practitioner. Leadership and interpersonal skills developed in your extracurricular activities, participating in scientific research in a summer program, and a volunteer or paid clinical experience in a healthcare setting, are all important. Letters of recommendation, personal interviews, and a desire to become a healthcare provider in underserved communities are also considered in your application for admission.

The educational endeavor on which you are embarking is a worthy one that merits all your diligence and effort. California faces a serious shortage of health care professionals, especially in communities that have a high percentage of Hispanic, African-American, and Native American people, as well as communities of recent immigrants from throughout the world. Statistically, Latinos only represented 4.8% of the total physicians in California in 2004, only 5% of all dentists in LA County, and just over 3% of registered nurses. Minority students who choose a health career have a unique opportunity to serve their community in a meaningful way. We all have a vested interest in your success, which will ultimately benefit the health and welfare of our community and the nation.
THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS:
Are they the right choice for you?

Many students want to become a doctor without having much knowledge, experience or exposure to the field. Have you thought about and researched other careers? Have you chosen medicine because you want to please your parents or gain prestige and wealth? It is critical that you have a clear understanding of your motivation. Are you prepared for the academic, physical, and emotional stamina demanded in medical training and eventually the profession? Your feelings of helplessness over the loss of a patient or frustration in the diagnosis of a debilitating disease with no cure are only two of the many emotional challenges you may face. Other considerations are the daily exposure to people who are ill and in need of your service, the choices you will make between your family and career, and the necessary commitment to lifelong learning. These are only a few of the many questions you need to consider seriously.

You will change and grow as your exposure to practical medicine increases. The more opportunities you can give yourself to relate to people and their physical and emotional needs, the more chances you will have to mature and test your commitment to medicine. In order for you to gain a real understanding of medicine and why it is the right profession for you, it is important to have health-related volunteer or paid experiences. You need to experience first-hand, and preferably over some length of time, what patient-care is and how a team of health professionals works. Clinical experience demonstrates to admission officers that you are truly interested and committed to the field. It is not likely to be the deciding factor that gets you into the professional school, but it can be the most important thing you do to help you decide if this is your calling. Besides, it can provide tremendous motivation when you need to study organic chemistry!

Your volunteer work could be in many different situations and at many times in your undergraduate education. Consider nursing homes, crisis centers, nurseries, rehabilitation centers, shelters, and paramedic units. Cerritos College has a one semester Emergency Med-Tech five unit course (HO 9), and you can become a paramedic if you pass the state exam. Look for information about volunteering at the website of a local hospital or clinic, or talk to the volunteer coordinator about your interests, explaining to them what you hope to experience and learn. Remember that patients will be a cross section of the community, with various ages, ethnic and racial background, and personalities, and working with diverse patients can provide you with great experience. It is not where you are volunteering that is important, but rather what you learn, the experience you have, and how it affects you. The earlier you start, the better.

For those students who are entering dentistry, podiatry or optometry, volunteering may not be as accessible as for those students considering medicine. It is important, however, that you understand your profession and what it entails. You can gain such insight by a “shadowing” experience with a member of your desired profession, and these experiences are arranged just by asking a health professional. This may even allow you (after they have seen your performance and dependability) to continue on into a longer volunteer experience.
SOME HEALTH CAREERS:

Acupuncturist
Ambulance Attendant/Driver
Anesthesiologist Assistant
Athletic Trainer
Bacteriologist
Bilingual Home Health Aide
Bioinformatics Specialist
Biomedical Lab Scientist
Biosafety Specialist
Blood Bank Technician
Cardiovascular & Respiratory Therapist
Cell Culture Technician
Chiropractic Assistant
Chiropractor
Clinical Ethicist
Community Health Educator
Dental Assistant
Dental Hygienist
Diagnostic Radiologist
Dietetic Technician Assistant
Dietitian
Disaster Medical Specialist
Emergency Medical Technician
Emergency-Room Care Physician Assistant
Environmental Health Specialist
Epidemiologist
Exercise Physiologist
Family Planning Specialist
Forensic Examiner
Forensic Psychologist
Genetic Counselor
Genetic Engineer
Gerontology Researcher
Global Health Scientist
Health Services Administrator
Intensive Care Technician
International Health Specialist
Laboratory Assistant/Technician
Licensed Vocational Nurse
Medical Assistant
Medical Illustrator
Medical Records Technician
Medical Radiologist
Medical Social Worker
Medication Aide
Microbiologist
Nuclear Medicine Radiologist
Nuclear Science Technician
Nurse Anesthetist
Nurse Midwife
Nurse Practitioner
Nursing Aide
Nursing Assistant
Occupational Therapist
Operating Room Technician
Ophthalmic Assistant/Technician
Optometrist
Paramedic
Pathobiologist
Pediatric Nurse
Pharmacy Clerk/Technician
Phlebotomist
Physical Therapist
Physical Therapist Aide/Assistant
Physician Assistant
Podiatrist
Professional Health Planner
Prosthetics & Orthotics
Psychiatric Technician
Psychologist
Public Health Careers
Quality Assurance Technician
Registered Nurse
Rehabilitation Counselor
Research Science Assistant
Respiratory Therapist
Scientific Sales Specialist
Speech Pathologist
Surgical Technician
Veterinarian
Veterinary Assistant/Technician
Academic Building Blocks to a Career in the Health Professions

**Specialty Board Examinations**

**Internship & Residency**
2-8 Years, Clinical Training

**State Board Examinations**

**Professional School**
(i.e. Dental, Medical, Optometry Pharmacy or Veterinary School)
2 Years Basic Sciences and 2 Years Clinical Rotations

**Entrance Exam**
Dental Admission Test (DAT)
Medical College Entrance Exam (MCAT)
Optometry Admission Test (OAT)
Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT)

**University**
Bachelor’s Degree
Upper Division General Education and Coursework in Your Major

**Community College**
Associate’s Degree
Lower Division General Education, Sciences & Math

**High School**
Diploma
Ideally Pre-Calculus, Biology, Chemistry & Physics, Advanced Placement (if available)
What is Project HOPE?
Health Opportunities and Pipeline to Education

Project HOPE is a program committed to creating a supportive environment in which students with diverse backgrounds are given the tools to help them succeed in the pursuit of their educational goals in healthcare or science. Supported by a variety of funding sources outside the college, it provides many services that help students persist through the educational pipeline and find success in math and science classes, leading to health professions and careers in science.

Project HOPE works closely with the neighboring K-12 school districts to articulate courses and activities related to math and science, helping to keep students in the beginning of the educational pipeline and building a good foundation for later studies. It establishes partnerships with four-year institutions to coordinate activities and ensure that transfer students are successful in math and science-based majors and prepared for application to health professional schools.

Many ethnic and racial groups, especially Hispanic, African-American, and Native American, are underrepresented in the health professions, and, in addition, the large immigrant populations in the southern Los Angeles region need health professionals of many nationalities, speaking many languages, to help bring healthcare to those who need it. Project HOPE is designed to meet the need of increasing the number of students from underrepresented groups who are successful in math and science courses and ultimately, entering careers in healthcare and science.

Activities supported by Project HOPE include: academic support through tutoring and supplemental instruction, academic success and leadership program, community service opportunities, additional counseling services, parent and student workshops, HO 100 course in Health of Underserved Communities, and scholarships.

For more information about Project HOPE, contact the Project HOPE office at (562) 860-2451 ex. 2517 or visit the website www.cerritos.edu/hope.

Professional School Prerequisites

In the Cerritos College catalog there is detailed information about prerequisites necessary for PRE-CHIROPRACTIC, PRE-DENTAL, PRE-MEDICAL, PRE-OPTOMETRY, PRE-PHARMACY, PRE-VETERINARY courses of study. The courses required for all these programs are very similar, so it is possible to follow a common course sequence and make a final decision later when you have learned more about the different professions. Generally these common courses are: BIOL200-201, CHEM 111-112, CHEM 211-212, PHYS 101-102 or 201-202, MATH 170, ENGL 100-102, and PSYC 101. See a counselor once every semester to make sure you are taking the best courses to reach your goal.
Which is the Best MAJOR for Acceptance to a Health Professional School?

Health professional schools do not require a major in a particular field. Pre-Dental, Pre-Medical, Pre-Optometry, Pre-Pharmacy, Pre-Veterinary and Pre-Chiropractic are not considered majors, but collections of courses that prepare you for the professional school courses. The pre-professional courses are included in many majors in the natural sciences, so it is reasonable that many applicants major in Biology or Chemistry, but a science major is NOT required for admission to a health professional school. It is possible to major in any of a large number of disciplines, as long as you add the course requirements for the specific professional school you hope to attend. In choosing an undergraduate major, you should give careful consideration to select a major of study that interests you and will provide a foundation necessary for the pursuit of an alternative career, if necessary.

For further information concerning which major would be best, please visit the Career Services Center and schedule a counseling appointment with a Career Counselor.

Grade Point Average

Students are understandably concerned about achieving a high grade point average, since health professional schools are highly competitive. Too often, students are also concerned about how long it will take them to get to professional school, and they try to take too many classes to do well in all of them. You need to carefully evaluate your study skills, time management, academic strengths and weaknesses, family responsibilities, job hours, social life, extracurricular participation, and community activities to balance them with the number of classes you are taking. Remember also, the general rule of thumb is that for each hour in class a student should study two to three hours outside of class, and additional time may be necessary for study groups, tutoring, and seeing your instructors during their office hours. Trying to complete the college coursework too quickly can actually decrease the quality of your work, lower your GPA, and increase the time that is needed to obtain your career goal. You must carefully plan to maintain the highest GPA possible.

Choosing a University for TRANSFER

When you are in the process of selecting which university you will attend in order to complete upper-division (junior/senior) coursework, please remember: the best choice is a well-informed choice. Do not choose a university because your cousin went to USC or all your friends are going to CSU Los Angeles because it’s closest to home. It is important that you make a decision based on what will assure your educational and career success.
Think of grouping the universities and four-year colleges into three systems: two public systems (Cal State University and University of California) and a third system including all private/independent colleges. Many people believe the more expensive the university, the better the school, but the tuition (or fees) does not determine the quality of the university or the right university for you.

The Transfer Center is the place to visit – early and often. It offers university catalogs for students to review and appointments with various university representatives. Use the Internet to explore CSUMentor.edu and calstate.edu, UCOP.edu and ucop.edu/pathways, as well as individual university websites. Make sure to visit the university and any of the departments important to your major. After extensively researching colleges, select your first choice and any alternate options.

A strong benefit in attending a UC campus is that graduate professional schools tend to regard UC as better preparation than most CSUs or private/independent universities and, therefore, accept more students from the UC system. On the other hand, the benefit of attending a private/independent college is that your grade point average may not have to be as high as at UC. Don’t be deterred by the high cost of attending a private college, since they provide much more financial aid.

Some questions you might ask before making your decision:
- Who teaches the lecture classes, teaching assistants (TAs) or full-time faculty?
- If I work during the day, do they teach the classes I need in the evening?
- How well do the graduates score on the Dental Admission Test (DAT), Pharmacy Colleges Admissions Test (PCAT), or Medical Colleges Admissions Test (MCAT)?
- How many students from the university actually get accepted into professional schools?
- What is the cultural diversity of faculty and students?
- Do they have successful tutorial services?
- Do they have a Health Professions Advisement Center?
- What health career student organizations do they have on campus?
- What scientific research programs exist on this campus?

Your AUTOBIOGRAPHY

When you decide you want to pursue a health career you should begin to write down the story of your life and why you want to use your talents and abilities in the health profession you have chosen. It will focus your thinking on who you are and how you will contribute to your future career, and it will help you express yourself in the way that professional schools will be expecting. Take plenty of time to answer the questions below verbally and in writing. You may want to answer some questions now, and come back later to re-write, expand, or begin other answers. Writing a journal is a good way to organize your information and thoughts.
Your autobiography will be very valuable to you at several points in your education and in the
application process to health professional schools. It will be worthwhile when you write an
application essay for acceptance to a transfer institution and to the health professional school, as
well as applications for employment, summer outreach programs, research programs or
scholarships. It will be very helpful in preparing you for an interview and helping those people
who will be writing letters of recommendation for you.

A. Describe your family background and any personal obstacles (i.e., economics, life
   events, lack of academic opportunities, first-generation college student, language
   barrier, immigration) you have had to overcome. What qualities do you have that have
developed while overcoming these obstacles? How will overcoming such obstacles
help you as a health professional?

B. What is your professional goal? List and briefly explain the three most positive things
about the profession you are pursuing. List and briefly explain the three most negative
aspects of a professional health career. If you have had clinical experience with this
profession, use examples of what you experienced to help answer this question.

C. Why does your chosen profession fit you better than any other profession? What are
some other professions you have considered and decided against?

D. Describe your experiences in clinical/patient care settings (i.e., hospitals, nursing
homes, hospices, community clinics). Where was it, who was your supervisor, what
were your responsibilities, and how long were you there? Most importantly, what were
the most influential experiences you had there, how did you change from the
experience, and what did you learn from this activity?

E. You should always have complete, updated transcripts of all college-level courses you
have taken. Have you studied one or more science subjects in depth (i.e. taken several
semester sequence courses in one area)? Have you have studied one or more non-
science subjects in depth because you were interested in the subject?

F. Has any academic subject been particularly easy or particularly difficult for you?
Explain why.

G. What is your major, and why did you choose it?

H. Do you know how to calculate your GPA? What is your cumulative GPA? What is
your science course GPA? What is your non-science course GPA? Has your
cumulative GPA or your science GPA shown steady improvement?

I. List and briefly describe any research or scholarly activities that you have been
involved in during college. Include how long the project lasted, and the amount of time
per week that you spent on it. Describe your level of responsibility (i.e., how much
independence did you have in the various stages of the work?). List any publications or presentations resulting from the research projects. Most importantly, how did this experience develop skills that would be helpful to you as a health professional?

J. List all paid work experience you have had. Include approximate number of months employed and hours worked per week. If the job was in the health care field, be sure to include your duties, and supervisor’s name and title. Many jobs, even those not in health care, can develop skills important to a health professional. What did you learn from your work experiences?

K. Have you been involved in organized extracurricular activities or intercollegiate athletics? How much time have you devoted to these activities? What has been your level of involvement?

L. Describe any artistic or creative accomplishments or talents you have in fine arts, performing arts, literary arts, organizational or business endeavors.

M. List and briefly describe any experiences you have had which demonstrate a sustained commitment to serving others (i.e., care for the disabled, socially disadvantaged, or other community service). Indicate your level of involvement, time devoted to it, what you learned from it, and what it meant to you.

N. If you have a particular interest in being a health professional serving populations with less access to health care, briefly describe any activities/experiences which you feel demonstrate that interest. What has your role been in these activities and how much time have you devoted to them? What about these experiences has been most meaningful for you, and why?

O. What experience do you have in leadership positions (i.e., club officer, team captain, class officer, project organizer, mentor)? What experiences suggest that you have the potential to become a leader in the professional field you are pursuing?

P. If you have had any experiences not already described, such as foreign study, internship, mentoring, or volunteerism, describe them and explain their importance to you.

Q. What non-academic activities (i.e., hobbies) interest you, and why? What do you do to relax or to take care of yourself?

R. Make a list of all your science professors and employers or supervisors. How many do you know well enough that you would feel comfortable approaching them to write a strong letter of support? How could you get to know them or others better, so that they could/would write a strong letter in your support? When you are ready to have letters written for you, provide each person with the information in your autobiography.
Health Professions Admissions Tests

Different types of professional schools require specific tests for admission – the major ones are the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) for medical, osteopathic, podiatric, and some veterinary schools, the Dental Admission Test (DAT), Optometry Admission Test (OAT), and the Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT). Tests are usually taken at the end of the junior year, and registration information is available at the website of each professional organization (aamc.org, ada.org, opted.org, pcatweb.info). Testing is online for all the tests, except for the PCAT. The length of the tests is from 4 (OAT) to 5 ½ (MCAT) hours.

These tests are nationally administered general tests of your academic achievement and intellectual ability. Each type of test has its own characteristics, but they all generally cover your knowledge of natural and physical sciences (although Physics is only specifically covered on the MCAT and OAT), your facility with scientific problem solving and critical thinking, your verbal reasoning or reading comprehension skills and quantitative skills. Writing essays are part of the MCAT and the PCAT, while the DAT has its own unique perceptual ability component. It is clear that your entire college academic experience is valuable in preparation for these tests.

It is very important that you find out well in advance (before you transfer) what is covered on the test you will be taking and the format of the questions. You should schedule enough time early in your junior year to undertake a serious and thorough review of the subjects covered by the test. Test preparation workshops and courses are very helpful, as are practice tests. Do not take the real test for practice, since every set of scores you receive will be considered seriously by the professional school. If you do not do well on the test the first time, you may repeat it, but don’t repeat it until you are confident that you will receive higher scores on your second attempt.

MEDICAL SCHOOLS and the Application Process for Admission

There are two types of medical schools: allopathic and osteopathic. Allopathic doctors are the traditional medical doctors (MDs) and osteopathic doctors are Doctors of Osteopathy (DOs). The difference between the two branches of medicine lies in the philosophy: the allopathic system stresses the importance of eliminating the symptoms of disease or ailments, relying primarily on drugs and/or surgery, while osteopathy is a system of health care which focuses on treating the whole person, with special emphasis on nutrition and body mechanics. Manipulative techniques are used for diagnosis and to relieve pain and/or restore range of motion.

In the United States and its territories, there are approximately 125 allopathic medical schools that grant Doctorates of Medicine and approximately 20 osteopathic medical schools that grant Doctorates of Osteopathy. Allopathic and osteopathic medical schools share the following
characteristics: four years of medical school, including two years of didactic (science) and two years of clinical experience; specialist or generalist tracks; and board exams for licensure. Students interested in either type of medical school attain undergraduate degrees (BA or BS) and complete similar science prerequisites.

California has eight allopathic medical schools and two osteopathic medical schools. Among the state’s allopathic schools are the five public schools on the University of California campuses at Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco and three private medical schools at Loma Linda University, Stanford University, and the University of Southern California. Osteopathic medical education is provided by Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona and the Tuoro University College of Osteopathic Medicine in San Francisco. The majority of pre-med students apply to at least 7 medical schools both in and out of the state of California.

The ultimate goal of the admission process is the selection of students who will be successful in future careers as physicians and medical scientists. To achieve these goals, admissions committees assess a wide range of factors that are considered to be predictive of future success. These include academic preparation, an aptitude for science, enthusiasm for learning, excellent reading and writing skills, excellent communication and interpersonal skills, interest in public service, and extraordinary personal commitment.

Academic preparation requires the completion of both general education requirements and specific science and math prerequisites. These requirements typically include undergraduate courses in biology, mathematics, inorganic and organic chemistry, physics, and at some schools biochemistry, molecular biology, or genetics. These studies are prerequisites for the basic science courses taught during the first two years of medical school and other professional schools, which usually include anatomy, biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, pathology, and pharmacology. Undergraduate science grades and admissions test scores, such as the Medical Colleges Admission Test (MCAT), are generally predictive of success in completing the courses of the first two years of medical school and the first part of the board exam for licensure (U.S. Medical Licensing Examination -USMLE). Be aware that there is financial assistance available through the American Association of Medical Colleges (aamc.org) for the MCAT registration fee and for the AMCAS application.

During the first two years of medical school you will study the basic sciences, as well as begin learning the fundamental techniques of taking a medical history and examining patients. In the third and fourth year you'll go into clinical settings to observe and work with experienced doctors and begin to learn how to take care of patients. You will also explore the wide variety of specialties within medicine, such as family practice, internal medicine, surgery, psychiatry, obstetrics and gynecology, and pediatrics. After medical school, you will spend three to seven years in residency, gaining further experience and training.

To be successful in patient care, students must demonstrate an ability to apply what they have learned and to communicate and interact effectively with patients, faculty, staff, and peers. Personal judgment, maturity, compassion, and professionalism are among the qualities that are expected, valued, and routinely evaluated as part of student performance during the second two years of medical school, and on into residency training.
It is important that students contemplating a medical career understand the full range of skills and qualities needed for success in medical school and future practice. Students in community colleges have a wide range of academic preparation, and it is important to know that no matter what level of academic preparation you start with, you have the opportunity to take all the appropriate coursework and to seek whatever help you need to attain the academic excellence you need for admissions to a medical school.

**A TYPICAL ADMISSIONS PROCESS:**

Prior to the actual application process, you should have decided to which schools you will be applying, and you should have copies of all your college transcripts. The beginning of the application process is when you fill out the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) application form, which is available online at aamc.org/amcas. Applications are accepted beginning in May of each year, and you should give yourself plenty of time (hours!) for its completion.

**Step 1: Review of Applications**

All California medical schools begin by evaluating preliminary data provided in your AMCAS application. This information includes grades, MCAT scores, and a one-page personal statement. While differences exist among schools, students with a GPA below B- (3.00) and below average scores on the MCAT are usually screened out at the first step. Exception to this general practice may include students who have had some low grades due to illness or other hardships or students who excelled in graduate school after a poor undergraduate experience. A review of the applicant’s personal statement enables admissions committees to make an assessment about whether such circumstances apply. In all cases, low MCAT scores are difficult to excuse.

Students whose initial materials are evaluated favorably are asked to submit “secondary” or supplemental application information.

**Step 2: Review of Supplemental Application Material**

The secondary application includes an application fee (if you are eligible for a fee waiver from AAMC, you are probably eligible for a fee waiver from the individual institutions for their secondary applications), letters of recommendation, and supplemental information which may be helpful to the committee. After secondary information is received, an overall evaluation is conducted of the entire application to determine which applicants will be invited for a personal interview.

**Step 3: Applicant interviews**

Most schools interview roughly 10 percent of their total applicant pool. Applicants routinely have two personal interviews, although they may have only one, or as many as four. After the interviews have been evaluated, the entire file is read and a subset of the committee makes a recommendation regarding whether or not the applicant should be offered admission, be rejected, or placed in a waiting category.

**Step 4: Committee Decisions**

The next step varies between institutions but generally involves a review of the entire process by a senior official, such as the dean. Approved applicants are sent letters of acceptance, rejected
applicants are sent letters of regret, and those on the waiting list are referred back to the committee for ranking. No school is able to offer admission to all of the acceptable applicants.

Step 5: Student Choices
If you receive offers of admission from more than one medical school, you should consider a number of factors before making a final choice: specialties offered, teaching approach (traditional vs. case studies), student services, anticipated costs of attendance; financial aid offered; location of the school (e.g. urban versus rural setting); and diversity of the student body, faculty, and surrounding community.

TIMELINE & STUDENT TIPS

COMMUNITY COLLEGE SEMESTERS: LOWER-DIVISION COURSEWORK
FRESHMAN YEAR (0-29 lower-division transferable units)

- Take the Cerritos College Assessment Tests which consist of a Reading Test, English Test, and Basic Math Test and/or Intermediate Algebra Readiness Test and/or Advanced Math Test. Discuss with the counselor which math test(s) you should take.

- Meet with your counselor (you may have a counselor for SEM, Project HOPE, or EOPS) and find out about professional school prerequisites. Plan your schedule carefully so that it is challenging, but not too heavy a course load, especially if you are working or have family responsibilities. Discuss whether you should attend summer school, if you should meet regularly with a tutor, and plan the coursework for future semesters. After your initial appointment make sure you schedule future counseling appointments early every semester in order to make sure you are taking the correct courses and are preparing for your career appropriately.

- Be sure to register every semester for any basic skills classes you may need (i.e., Reading, English, and Math).

- Find the Academic Support Center (ASC) in the library or ask Project HOPE about its tutorial services and supplemental instruction. Visit the Writing Lab for assistance for your class writing assignments.

- Get the names, phone numbers and email addresses of classmates so you can get notes and needed class information. Be sure to form study groups with classmates in those classes you find most difficult.
- Visit the instructor during office hours for clarification, extra instruction and to get acquainted so he or she knows about you and your goals. You may one day be asking instructors for a letter of recommendation.

- Join Project HOPE and student organizations like CCM for helpful activities, like leadership workshops, community service, and conference attendance.

- Visit the Career Services Center to explore health-career related resources, and schedule a Career Counseling appointment to explore possible majors you want to declare for your bachelor’s degree.

- Visit the Transfer Center and begin the process of deciding to which transfer institutions you will be applying.

- Decide what you want to do for the summer… take classes, do research, secure employment (part-time or full-time) or volunteer in a hospital, lab, clinic, pharmacy, animal shelter, dental office, or optometrist office. Investigate summer research or outreach programs at universities. Note that many of these programs require that you have completed general biology and at least one or two semesters of chemistry. Submit all applications and letters of recommendation for the summer programs before the deadlines.

- Compute your cumulative grade point average and your transferable grade point average (GPA) at the end of each semester. Always know what that GPA is in order to be constantly improving.

**SOPHOMORE YEAR** (30-59 lower-division transferable units)

- Each semester schedule a counseling appointment and discuss your program to make sure you complete the lower division major classes you need before you transfer.

- Early in the year, finalize your decisions on transfer institutions and undergraduate major (BA or BS degree) in preparation for professional school.

- With a non-science major, make sure you complete your lower-division major requirements before transferring as an upper-division junior. If you select a non-science major, you may consider completing your physics and organic chemistry at the university.

- If you select a science major and plan to transfer to a UC, it is strongly recommended that you complete calculus, organic chemistry and the calculus-based physics before you transfer. These courses are considered part of your lower division major requirements.
• Although it is not a university admissions requirement, by completing the required lower division general education (including US History and American Government) and the major requirements, you will have earned an Associate of Arts Degree. Congratulations!

• For CSU campuses, the earliest you can submit the application is October 1 to be admitted the following fall semester. For UC campuses, the earliest you can submit the application is November 1 to be admitted the following fall semester. Look into financial aid for the additional cost of transfer institutions.

• Make sure you are participating in the health-related clubs and organizations.

• Review health professional school websites to begin deciding to which schools you will be applying. Look at information about the admission test you will need to take, and consider how you will be preparing for it.

• If you are a Project HOPE student, remember to participate in the Project HOPE graduation ceremony. It means a lot to your family as well as the other students who are maneuvering through the pipeline.

• Look at the summer activities bullet above for freshman year, which applies also to this summer. Do you need a program that is an enrichment program (research for advanced science students), a program that provides MCAT preparation, clinical exposure, or a program for students who had difficulty with the sciences the previous year? Try to get an entry-level job related to your health-field interest and/or participate a few hours per week in a volunteer health care experience.

• Read the catalog of the university you will be attending and develop a long term educational plan for your upper division coursework. List specific questions you need to ask your department major advisor and the pre-health professional advisor at your transfer institution.

• Schedule a new transfer student orientation and/or advisement appointment at the university.

**UNIVERSITY SEMESTERS: UPPER-DIVISION COURSEWORK**

**JUNIOR YEAR (60-89 units)**

• Find the pre-professional advising center at the university. Ask about the university policies and procedures for applying to professional school. Are there workshops for admission test preparation? Is there a process for a committee letter of recommendation or will you collect individual faculty letters of recommendation?

• Schedule an appointment with your major department advisor. Discuss course requirements and research opportunities.
• Join pre-professional clubs and any other organization that will help you network.

• Get to know the second semester juniors and the seniors who have similar professional goals. They may be able to provide help with the AMCAS application, as well as suggestions preparing for admission exams.

• Visit your instructors during their office hours. Get aquatinted, and remember you will need letters of recommendation, especially from lab-science instructors.

• Make sure to attend campus activities and any local professional association conferences.

• Attend presentations from professional school recruiters.

• Seek out a mentor!

• Contact and get information from schools in which you are interested. Start making decisions about which professional school you want to attend: region of the country, living arrangements, finances, student and faculty diversity makeup, size of school, faculty/student ratio, traditional curriculum or problem-based learning style, etc.

• If your physics and organic chemistry are completed, take workshops or a preparation course for your DAT, MCAT, OAT or PCAT exam.

• In March/April rewrite and update your autobiography and resume.

• Decide which instructors, employers, or volunteer supervisors you would like to have write a letter of recommendation for you, and if they agree, give your autobiography and resume to each. Follow the procedure for requesting letters of recommendation at your school.

• Obtain copies of all college transcripts to assist with filling out application information.

• Take the professional school entrance examination. Be sure you are well-prepared; never take the exam just for practice. Have scores sent to the institutions to which you are applying.

• Visit professional schools, if possible, and talk with minority affairs officers, underrepresented minority students, and admissions deans.

• Complete the AMCAS application and submit it as early as possible. Get assistance from a writing lab if necessary to make sure it is well-written.

• Have transcripts sent to AMCAS or directly to each individual school, if required. Make sure you know all the different deadlines.
• Continue to participate in community service, clinical experience, and leadership opportunities.

SENIOR YEAR (90+ units)

• Complete secondary application packets and make sure letters of recommendation are sent.

• If you are not a science major, take biochemistry, genetics, molecular biology or other recommended elective science courses.

• Request a graduation evaluation from the admissions and records office during the next-to-last semester. Don’t wait until your last semester-- it will be too late. Complete all upper-division major requirements.

• Complete forms for financial assistance/student loans.

• Send updated transcripts requested by professional schools.

• Attend interviewing skills workshops. Check with the Career Placement Office or the pre-professional advising center for mock interview opportunities.

• Practice interviewing skills by yourself in front of a mirror, with friends, relatives, classmates, or with tape recording and videotape. Invest in a good interview outfit if you don’t have one.

• Invitations from professional schools for interviews are scheduled from September to April.

• Continue participating in community service, clinical experience, and leadership opportunities.

• Send thank-you notes to parents, instructors, evaluators, advisors, mentors and anyone else who helped you along the way.

• Prepare to attend summer orientation, if your professional school offers it.

CONGRATULATIONS!
ALTERNATIVES AFTER GRADUATION

After earning your bachelor’s degree, if you are not accepted to the health professional schools of your choice, do not immediately close the door to your career goal. Consider the following options:

- See your pre-health professions advisor for a realistic look at your application and suggestions for how to improve it. One third of all students entering medical school have applied more than once!

- If your academics were not strong, apply to a post-baccalaureate science program in order to review the sciences and prepare to retake the DAT, MCAT, OAT or PCAT so that you can reapply to professional schools with a stronger academic record.

- Take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) in order to apply to graduate school for a master's degree program in the biomedical sciences. Prepare to retake the admission test to strengthen your application.

- Consider an alternate career in the health professions that might be less competitive, but still fulfill your personal goals in health care.

- Participate in clinical experiences or community service opportunities related to the health care field you are interested in, if that was insufficient in your application.

- Take the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) to qualify as a substitute high school science or math teacher, in order to give you time to improve your application or find out if teaching is a good career for you.

- Explore alternate career options at the university Career Services Center and apply for full-time employment utilizing your bachelor’s degree and healthcare experience.